

ORGANIZATIONS THAT SEEK THE LEGALIZATION OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN OUR COUNTRY

HON. MARK E. SOUDER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 25, 2005

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to call attention to the work of organizations that seek the legalization of illicit drugs in our country, to the detriment of the health and safety of our citizens.

On January 4, 2005, the Washington Post published an article entitled "Exhale, Stage Left," chronicling the career of Keith Stroup, the founder and retiring executive director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). This article sheds light on some of the operations and claims of such organizations, and I ask that it be entered into the RECORD.

Particularly disturbing in this story is the entanglement of the drug legalization group with those who stand to profit from others' addiction—drug traffickers. The Washington Post article describes that one of the major early financial backers of NORML was "the legendary pot smuggler" Tom Forcade. To collect donations, Stroup even went to Forcade's "stash house," which was "filled with bales of marijuana." Certainly we can understand why a drug smuggler would contribute generously to efforts to legalize drugs like marijuana—with so much product to move, this man had a vested financial interest in making harmful drugs easier for people to obtain. But what kind of group takes money from such a criminal? Do we really want our laws "reformed" by efforts funded by criminal enterprises? Yet according to the article, it had seemed "perfectly normal for NORML to call a dope smuggler when it ran short of cash."

Drug legalization groups like to claim that marijuana is not really harmful and that it does not serve as a "gateway" to the use of other dangerous drugs. In fact, on its website, NORML claims, "There is no conclusive evidence that the effects of marijuana are causally linked to the subsequent use of other illicit drugs." Perhaps NORML needs to look back at the experiences of its own leaders to re-examine such an assertion. The Post article describes how Stroup and his colleagues themselves moved onto other drugs in the 1970s: "Privately, he and his NORML pals joked about forming an advocacy group for another drug they'd begun to enjoy—cocaine." I'm sure that the families who have suffered through the heartaches of cocaine addiction could inform NORML that cocaine abuse is no laughing matter. Stroup has come to realize that as well, admitting that his own use of cocaine may have led to lapses in professional judgment and that he knows now that "[c]ocaine is deadly." Once, though, he had thought cocaine harmless. If he was wrong about cocaine, might he not likewise be wrong in presuming marijuana harmless?

In an attempt to make marijuana sound "harmless," drug legalization groups also try to downplay the addictive qualities of marijuana. NORML states on its website, "While the scientific community has yet to achieve full consensus on this matter, the majority of epidemiological and animal data demonstrate that the reinforcing properties of marijuana in hu-

mans is low in comparison to other drugs of abuse . . ." Yet the leaders of legalization themselves exhibit not simply social or occasional use of marijuana, but regular consumption of it. According to the article, Stroup smokes pot "nearly every night" as he watches the evening news.

Our citizens—especially our youth—need to understand the real danger of dependence on marijuana. It's not as innocuous as legalizers would have us believe. As the Office of National Drug Control Policy has reported, "According to the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 4.3 million Americans were classified with dependence on or abuse of marijuana. That figure represents 1.8 percent of the total U.S. population and 60.3 percent of those classified as individuals who abuse or are dependent on illicit drugs . . . What makes this all the more disturbing is that marijuana use has been shown to be three times more likely to lead to dependence among adolescents than among adults."

We need to be aware of marijuana's harms. Last year NIDA Director Nora Volkow testified at a hearing before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, which I chair. Dr. Volkow attested to the health risks associated with marijuana, saying, "There are numerous deleterious health consequences associated with short- and long-term marijuana use, including the possibility of becoming addicted. During the period of intoxication, marijuana disrupts short-term memory, attention, judgment, as well as other cognitive functions. In addition, marijuana has also been shown to impair coordination and balance, and can increase an individual's heart rate." Marijuana, Dr. Volkow testified, can affect the entire body: "New research is also showing us that marijuana can affect almost every organ in the body, from the central nervous system to the cardiovascular, endocrine, respiratory/pulmonary, and immune systems. Because marijuana is typically rolled into a cigarette or 'joint' and smoked, it has been shown to greatly impact the respiratory system and increases the likelihood of some cancers." Marijuana use is connected to lifelong difficulties for our youth: "Also, we are finding that early exposure to marijuana is associated with an increased likelihood of a lifetime of subsequent drug problems."

With all the risks that marijuana poses, we cannot afford to allow drug legalization groups to perpetuate their myths about the "harmlessness" of marijuana—especially when even their own history casts doubt on the validity of their claims.

ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE KEEP OUR PACT ACT

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 25, 2005

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, it is with a sense of urgency that I reintroduce the Keep Our Promises to America's Children and Teachers Act at the outset of the 109th Congress.

I offer the Keep Our PACT Act today to help meet the aspirations of our nation's school children—and to help provide all of their

teachers and schools with the resources they need to help them achieve those aspirations. Additionally, I offer this bill as a reminder to those of us in government of the importance of keeping our promises and of truly making education the priority our constituents believe it to be.

Put simply, the Keep Our PACT Act would make good on two basic commitments the federal government has made but so far failed to keep: It would fully fund the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—on a mandatory basis, once and for all.

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal year 2005 Omnibus Appropriations bill funded No Child Left Behind at \$24.5 billion—\$9.8 billion below its authorized level and \$27 billion less cumulatively than the bipartisan agreement reached just four short years ago. As a result, over 2.4 million students are currently not getting the extra Title I help they were promised under NCLB.

Furthermore, the recently enacted Omnibus continued underfunding IDEA at \$10.7 billion—less than half the 40 percent average per pupil expenditure the federal government originally promised the states thirty years ago. An estimated 6.7 million students with disabilities are currently being shortchanged as a result of this abdication.

By keeping our commitments to NCLB and IDEA, we can support our schools, ease the property tax burden on our constituents and provide all of our students with the resources they need to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, once again I am proud to make the Keep Our PACT Act the very first piece of legislation I introduce this Congress. Additionally, I want to thank my colleagues joining me as original cosponsors on this bill today—in particular, Mr. MILLER, Ms. WOOLSEY and all of the Education and Workforce Committee Democrats. We pledge to stand for the fundamental values this bill represents and invite Members from both sides of the aisle to embrace those values and get this bill passed this year.

COMMEMORATING NATIONAL FOLIC ACID AWARENESS WEEK

HON. DAN BURTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 25, 2005

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the observance of America's first annual National Folic Acid Awareness Week which began this past Monday January 24, 2005. The theme of National Folic Acid Awareness Week—"Folic Acid: You Don't Know What You're Missing!" is especially timely given the increasing popularity of low or no-carbohydrate diets. Since 1998, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has required the addition of folic acid to enriched breads, cereals, flours, pastas, rice and other grain products. Consequently, people, particularly women, on these low-carb diets may in fact not be getting the appropriate daily allowance of the essential vitamins and minerals necessary for health and well being.

Folic Acid—a B-vitamin—is in particular critical for proper cell growth, and it has been scientifically proven to prevent certain birth defects of the brain and spine called Neural

Tube Defects (NTD), which occurs very early in pregnancy, before most women even know they are pregnant. The most common NTDs are Spina Bifida, lack of closure in the spinal column, and Anencephaly, a condition where only a portion of the brain forms. Seventy thousand people are living with Spina Bifida today; it is the most common permanently disabling condition in America. Children born with Spina Bifida suffer from a myriad of problems, including: paralysis, fluid on the brain, learning difficulties and depression. Those affected with Anencephaly are usually stillborn or die soon after birth.

It is sobering to think that as much as seventy percent of the incidence of NTDs could be prevented if women of childbearing age simply took a 400 microgram pill of folic acid every day. I am hopeful that programs like the National Folic Acid Awareness Week which stress the importance of a healthy diet combined with a daily folic acid pill, we can prevent many of the 2,500 to 3,000 babies born every year with NTDs.

As an added bonus, emerging research also indicates that folic acid might reduce the risk of other birth defects such as cleft lip, cleft palate and heart defects. It might even reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and colon,

cervical, and breast cancer. So taking adequate amounts of folic acid can in fact be beneficial for men and woman of all ages.

Mr. Speaker, the most precious of our American treasures is our children. I believe it is incumbent upon us policy makers to encourage not only those we know and love, but all Americans, to eat foods rich in folic acid such as, bananas, fresh spinach, and orange juice. We owe it to future generations to do all we can to give them a head start on a healthy life devoid of pain and suffering. So I ask my colleagues to join me in promoting the message of National Folic Acid Awareness Week, and to make the commitment to work, not only this week but every week, to encourage all Americans to take folic acid, and help eradicate neural tube defects forever.

RECOGNIZING THE RETIREMENT
OF TONY RAMOS

HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 25, 2005

Mr. ROGERS of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the retirement of Mr.

Blas (Tony) Ramos of Lansing, Michigan. For the last 24 years, Mr. Ramos has served the people of the State of Michigan as an employee with the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department, the Wage and Hour Division of Department of Labor & Economic Growth and the Michigan Employment Security Commission. In addition to his service to the State of Michigan, Mr. Ramos has also served honorably in the Michigan National Guard, helping to preserve freedom and democracy abroad and keeping Michiganders safe at home.

Dedicated public servants like Mr. Ramos are a rare breed. Following the terrorist attacks after September 11, 2001, President Bush challenged all Americans to serve their communities. Mr. Ramos has been answering that challenge for the last 24 years. Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Mr. Ramos for his years of dedicated service and to wish him all the best on his retirement.